

Farewell to DeLeon

by Morris Hillquit

Mr. DeLeon:—

When you were challenged in my behalf to a public debate in Worcester, you pronounced the challenge “fishy” on the ground that it was not issued in the city of New York, where we both live and were best known, and in my absence you bravely indulged in the vilest of abuses and meanest denunciations of me.

When I challenged you in the city of New York, offering you, in decent terms, an opportunity to prove your slanders to my face and depriving you of all pretexts to decline, you did exactly what I expected of you — you ignored the challenge altogether.

We have known you to challenge ignorant, second-rate Democratic and Republican politicians whom you knew would not dare to appear in public debate, with an intrepidity that does you credit; we have known you to display a remarkable degree of courage in insulting a defenseless woman, incomparably your better in all respects, when you were 200 miles away from her reach;¹ we have seen you even physically knock down an undersized, weak, and tottering old man (Philly, of the Socialist Cooperative Publishing Association) with a chivalrous heroism of the medieval knight. But when it comes to meet a man who may know something of your history and your ways and who may have the audacity to tell what he knows in open and manly debate, you display still greater energy and alacrity in sneaking out of it. Oh, plumed knight of the Aggressive Tactics!

I am done with you, Mr. DeLeon. By your despicable conduct in this matter, you have forfeited all remnants of your claims to that degree of respect to which a decent man is entitled even at the hands of his adversary.

In the future I shall take no notice of you or your mischievous doings, nor, I feel confident, will any self-respecting socialist. With the few following remarks we close our accounts.

But, in closing, I think it but proper to sum up briefly your mental and moral makeup and the fruits of your activity in the socialist movement of this country. If my remarks should not serve to enlighten the dwindling band of your faithful followers, they may at least be of

some value to your future biographers as the observations of a humble citizen on the life and character of a great contemporary.

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Unknown to us and of rather mysterious antecedents, you made your descent upon the labor movement during the stormy days of the Henry George campaign.² You had a fairer share of culture and better mental abilities than what the average man in our movement possesses. It was hoped that you would devote your attainments and qualities to the cause of socialism, unselfishly and honestly, and that following the example of our great European leaders, you would become a power for good in the socialist movement.

The men who had laid the foundation of the movement in this country, the men who had strengthened and developed it by incessant toil, dogged perseverance, and endless sacrifices, made haste to efface themselves before the new luminary with their traditional modesty. They opened to you all positions of trust and confidence within the party and heaped on you all honors in their gift. They placed you in charge of their most precious weapon — the party press. They made you their spokesman and entrusted to you the education of the rising generation of socialists.

And you?

You repaid their confidence in the manner of the proverbial snake reared on the bosom of the kind hermit. You replaced principle by intrigue and agitation by abuse; you poisoned the minds of your young and inexperienced readers by instilling into them the narrow doctrines of hate and intolerance.

Yourself a foreigner, you espoused the senseless clamors of American jingoism and pseudo-patriotic knownothingness with a zeal and ardor characteristic of a renegade. You strove to revive the dormant racial and national prejudices in the party; you sowed strife and dissension in the ranks of the members, and you almost succeeded in disrupting the party, in the building up of which you had no share.

Of all the ten commandments of the scriptures, there is, I believe, but one which you have strictly enforced: "I am the Lord, thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before me."³

Jealous of your supremacy in the party and utterly indifferent to the welfare of the socialist movement, you have systematically repelled every man of ability and energy who could become your rival in the

leadership of the party. Openly or covertly you antagonized every editor of our party organs and every man of note in our ranks.

You surrounded yourself with a number of insignificant and immature youths whose fawning adoration flattered your childish vanity and whom you corrupted by making them do spy duty for you; and when the day of reckoning came, you found yourself abandoned and disavowed by all party organs and the best men in the party, retaining only that element which, through years of systematic stultification, you have made unfit and undesirable as members of a socialist party.

You may be an honest man in the sense of the penal code, but there is not a true and honest line in your entire moral makeup. You cannot conceive of an argument without brazenly misquoting and deliberately misconstruing the words of your adversary. Lying has become with you a profession, and slander a fine art. The words “friendship,” “loyalty,” and “solidarity” have absolutely no meaning for you. You recognize as friends only those who are ready blindly to serve your petty and sinister schemes, and all those who dare to criticize your methods and ends, you regard as your personal enemies. Some you extol as models of civic virtue, and you unblushingly brand the same men as incurable criminals as soon as they turn against you. In your disputes you do not attack the views or logic of your opponents, but their personal traits and private lives, and in doing this you have a special liking for the dastardly method of directing your attacks against their sources of earning a living. If your adversary happens to be a journalist, you will proclaim him illiterate, muddleheaded, and unfit for his position, although the point in dispute may not at all involve his journalistic qualifications; if your adversary is a physician, you will call him a quack, and if he is a lawyer, you will call him a shyster. You know, of course, that these appellations do not tend to prove your contentions, but they satisfy best your petty desire of revenge, and that is your chief consideration.

You are endowed with traits of character that would qualify you best for the now defunct office of Grand Inquisitor in the land of your birth — Spain; you could fill with credit the position of a public prosecutor in the land of my birth — Russia; and you would make an efficient chief in the land of our mutual adoption — the United States.

Howe, with your admirable qualities, your ever chanced to stray into the socialist movement is a mystery that can only be explained by a queer aberration of human destinies, unless, indeed, the future will reveal to us some more plausible explanation of the remarkable phenomenon.

Your mission in the movement is one of ruin and destruction. You have ruined the organizations you joined, you have formed new organizations in order to destroy them, and you did your best to reduce the size of the party to a minimum. Fortunately for the socialist movement in the country, the germs of self-destruction which you carry into any movement are rapidly working your own downfall. Already the greater and better part of your whilom followers are beginning to leave the sinking craft of your dwindling faction. You may yet continue for some time a freakish existence in the movement with a few isolated disciples, but as far as your baneful influence in the socialist movement is concerned, it will soon be a thing of the past. You are fast running into oblivion. My blessings on your way, Professor.

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¹ The allusion is unclear.

² Political economist Henry George ran for Mayor of New York in 1886 as the nominee of the United Labor Party.

³ From *Exodus* 20:2-3.